



- Prairie 5 • Child Care Choices
- Heartland Community Action
- Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council

Midwest

Minnesota

Child Care

Resource & Referral Network

Quality Care and Education

November 2009-February 2010

# Midwest Memo

## Parent Aware

Parent Aware, Minnesota's new quality rating system, is an exciting opportunity for early care and education programs to build on and improve the quality of their child care programs. Parent Aware is a voluntary rating system that is now in the pilot stage in a few communities of Minnesota including Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties and some areas of the Twin Cities. Programs from the pilot areas eligible to participate include licensed family child care, child care centers, Head Start and preschool programs.

Participating programs from these pilot areas receive ratings on a one-to-four star scale. The star ratings are based on a point system that measures best practices in four areas. These areas are family partnerships, teaching materials and strategies, tracking learning, and teacher training and education. Child care and early education programs submit documentation and supporting materials from each of the

four areas to receive their rating. Parents can then use the Parent Aware ratings posted on the website to assist in choosing quality programs for their children.

Parent Aware is "built upon the understanding that providing high-quality child care and early learning are not easy tasks and the pressures placed on our providers are many." In Parent Aware, programs are supported in their efforts to improve quality.

Although Parent Aware is not yet available in this area, child care providers can take steps to prepare their program for possible future participation in this rating tool. Visit the Parent Aware website at [www.parentawareratings.org](http://www.parentawareratings.org) and read through the information. Take a look at the Getting Ready (Building Quality, Making Good Things Better) checklists on the website. You may find that you are already doing many of the things needed to receive a

high rating. Another way to prepare is to become familiar with the Environment Rating Scale, a key tool used in the rating process. This is a great tool for assessing your own child care environment.

Providers can also take a training such as *Not by Chance: Child Care that Supports School Readiness* to help build knowledge and understanding of three quality support tools.

Whether participating in Parent Aware or not, building a quality program is important for the future success of the children in your care. Studies have shown that only 50% of Minnesota children entering kindergarten have all the skills needed to succeed. It is the quality of care that most impacts a child's development. As an early care and education provider, you have the awesome opportunity to make a difference in a child's readiness to begin school fully prepared.

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### Winter is on its Way!

Know the meaning of these important terms:

**Blizzard Warning**— There will be snow and strong winds that produce a blinding snow, deep drifts, and life threatening wind chills. Seek shelter immediately.

**Wind Chill Warning**— There will be sub-zero temperatures with moderate to strong winds expected which may cause hypothermia and great danger to people, pets, and livestock.

**Winter Weather Advisory**— Weather conditions may cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. If caution is exercised, these situations should not become life threatening.

**Winter Storm Warning**— Severe weather conditions have begun in your area.

**Winter Storm Watch**— Severe weather conditions are possible within the next day or two.

For more information  
Google:  
Child Care Weather Watch

## Continuing Education/Training: Learning that matters

CCCR&R continuing education/training seeks to positively impact the experiences of children in all child care settings by expanding the knowledge, skills, attitudes & beliefs of individuals who care for them. Research shows that 90% of brain development occurs between birth & age 5. Well prepared, well trained child care providers have been shown to

be more likely to provide the care children need during these years. In its national poll of parents, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies found that 93% of parents with children under the age of 6 want child care providers to participate in ongoing training. CCR&R training is coordinated with the

Minnesota Registry & the Minnesota Center for Professional Development. For Midwest CCR&R training opportunities visit our website at [www.midwestchildcare.com](http://www.midwestchildcare.com) Watch your mail for Midwest CCR&R Winter training catalog coming out in November or check our website after November 1.

## Region 6E (Serving Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville Counties)

### Local Workshops:

***Strategies for Inclusion of Children with Special Needs and their Families***, sponsored by MNAFEE, Minnesota Department of Education and PACER. Willmar Conference Center, Holiday Inn, Friday Nov. 13, 2009, 9 am- 3 pm. To register: [www.mnafee.org](http://www.mnafee.org)

**2009 Pact 4 Brain Conference**, Thursday, Nov. 19, 3-8 pm, Willmar Senior High School. Keynote by Dr. Esther Sternberg. To register: [www.pact4.org](http://www.pact4.org) or 320-235-8938

### **New in the Lending Library!**

**CD:** Dr. Jean's Ole! Ole! Ole! Songs in Spanish

**DVDs:** Sign With Your Baby DVD learning kit; Learning Happens DVD

**Books:** Building Literacy With Love; Learning to Read the World; The Inside Scoop (Tips from a Family Child Care Professional); Babies in the Rain; Deployment (Strategies for working with kids in military families); Easy Songs for Transitions; Ants in their Pants; Inclusive Literacy Lessons; Don't Get So Upset!; and **many more!**

Call Becky at 320-235-0850 or email: [beckyk@heartlandcaa.org](mailto:beckyk@heartlandcaa.org)

## Region 6W (Serving Big Stone, Chippewa, La Qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine Counties)

Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning early in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years.

*Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development (2000)*

Considering this, how important is quality child care to our children, families and the greater community? In one word, essential. That's why we at the Midwest District CCR&R, consider our child care advocacy efforts as top priority in providing safe and development-enriching environments and experiences for our children. CCR&R is intent on providing child care providers with the most current information on topics that impact children and the child care provider and the mediums we use for

sharing this information come in a variety of forms.

If you have any questions about our 6W-specific advocacy efforts, or have any suggestions for CCR&R/Region 6W, please feel free to contact Deb by calling 800.292.5437/320.269.8727 or emailing Deb at [debsp5@willmarnet.com](mailto:debsp5@willmarnet.com).

## Region 7W (Serving Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright Counties)

- **Caring for a Lifetime**, Save the Date! Child Care Choices conference is scheduled for Saturday, March 27, 2010
- The **Children of Multiple Cultures Conference** is being postponed until January. Watch your mailbox in December for more information.
- **Environmental Rating Scale** Child Care Choices is once again looking for child care professionals (Centers or Family Child Care) who are interested in going through the Environmental Rating Scale

(ERS) consultation program. During this consultation, the program and consultant will use the ERS tool to start discussion on where the child care professional wants to implement quality changes to their program. This is a process that takes place over several months and is at no cost to the child care professional. For more information on this process call Child Care Choices at 251-5081 or 800-288-8579 Ext. 501.

- Do you have child care openings and a

willingness to welcome families from other cultures? Teresa would love to talk with you and offer resources! Please contact her at (320)308-5709.

- We are here to help! If you have questions about rates, contracts and policies, marketing, insurance resources, behavior issues, age-appropriate activities, etc. please call Marcia, Jessica or Crystal at 251-5081 or 800-288-8549 ext. 501 for information and resources on any child care related question.

## Region 8 (Serving Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock Counties)

### **ERS Consultation**

Several early care and education programs right here in Region 8 have participated in an Environment Rating Scale Consultation to enhance the quality of care provided in their programs. So far, three family child care providers, three child care centers, and one preschool have participated in the consultation process. Each program has made important but simple changes to improve the quality of their environments.

These changes have included:

- improving health and safety practices,
- rearranging the environment to make materials more accessible.
- increasing learning experiences available to children in the activity areas of math, science, block play, dramatic play, art, music, sand/water play, and fine motor
- playground improvements
- Improvements in indoor space and furnishings

For the ERS consultation, each program uses the Environment Rating Scale tool as a basis for assessing quality and works with a consultant from SWCCRR to assess the program, develop an action plan and implement changes. The consultation process takes place over a period of several months and is truly a collaborative effort between the provider and the consultant.

If you are interested in learning more about an ERS consultation, please call SWCCRR at 800-658-2444 or 507-376-4195.

# Working with Parents

Most parents are very reasonable and simply want the best for their children. Provide an easy, comfortable way for them to give you feedback. Don't ignore legitimate complaints. Take their input seriously and act on requests whenever feasible. When parents see that you are responsive you will win their favor and support.

Some parents, however, make unreasonable requests or complain very often. If you provide care long enough, you will eventually have to deal with such a person. These suggestions may help you minimize complaining from parents and give you ways to deal with the unreasonable **complainers**:

- Make sure parents have a copy of your contract and policies and you have gone over them.
- Tell parents often about the **great** things their children said and did. Write these comments down for them. Send notes home.
- Set up a meeting with the chronic complainer to get to the root of the problem (it may have to do with the rates, a recent loss of income, marriage problems, guilt about not being with their child, etc.). A sympathetic ear may be a big help

## **Angry Parents:**

When confronted with an irate parent, regardless of the cause, just listen at first.

Use active listening techniques such as reflection ("What happened is really upsetting") and clarification ("What I hear you saying is that ..."). Note that this will diffuse much of the anger.

When the immediate anger has cooled you may be able to offer an explanation or rationale — your side of the story. Be aware, however, that some people are not interested in reasoning or are not able to reason. If this is the case, empathize with their concern and say what you've done to make sure the problem will not happen again. Leave the situation at that.

## **Complaints about your curriculum or style:**

This problem typically happens over clashes in values. You believe, for example, that children have the right to know the facts (appropriate to their age level) about sex or death. However, some parents believe that young children should not hear this information. These parents may get very emotional and let you know their concerns.

Discuss your perspective calmly using documented principles of early childhood development or recommendations from experts.

Let the majority rule. If possible and acceptable, come to some

compromises such as modifying your approach slightly, but don't abandon your curriculum or style.

## **Telling parents about the difficult behavior of their children:**

Many providers dread having to confront a parent with information about their child's behavior. They worry that the parent may become upset, defensive, blame the teacher or perhaps react too negatively towards their child.

Be sure to avoid the routine of informing the parent at 6:00 p.m. how "awful" their child has been during the day. At this time everyone is short tempered, tired, hungry, irrational. Some suggestions:

- Share a great deal of positive information with parents. Win the trust of parents through helpful, positive, and supportive communications. Show empathy and understanding and be responsive to their concerns.
- Talk with parents when you first see signs of a problem. Many times providers feel they can remedy the problem themselves or changes will occur as the child adjusts and matures. However, parents may be able to give you vital insights into the concern or know simple solutions, which may save weeks of stress.

## H1N1

I'm sure by now you have been swamped with information about H1N1, but I bet like all of us, you still have questions.

Since you are caring for young children who often put things in their mouths or who aren't good at covering coughs or sneezes, you need to be extra cautious about cleaning and sanitizing. H1N1 can live on surfaces for up to 8 hours. Therefore, you should pick up toys that have been mouthed or coughed/sneezed on as soon as you see the child has lost

interest and place it in a bin for cleaning and sanitizing prior to another child having access to it. Soapy water and the correct strength bleach water sanitizer is very effective and child friendly. You might also consider placing mat flooring down that is easily cleanable and having fewer toys available at any one time.

If your own child is home with influenza like symptoms and you are able to keep them completely away from your child care children, you can continue to provide care.

However, it is important to let families know about the situation so they can decide whether or not to send their child.

There is information available specific to child care and the unique needs you deal with when caring for very young children. Check out <http://www.mnchildcare.org/health/h1n1flu.php> for updated information and tools for yourself and to share with parents. Or call your local CCR&R if you have questions.



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Region 6E



Region 6W



Region 7W



Region 8

Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council



## Did You Know? Supports Are Available to Child Care Professionals

### What is T.E.A.C.H.?

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood@MINNESOTA is a scholarship program intended to help early childhood and school-age care professionals increase their levels of education, compensation and commitment to the field.

### How can T.E.A.C.H. help you?

Whether you are interested in exploring college as an option, are ready to pursue a college degree or are in the process of obtaining a National Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, T.E.A.C.H. has financial support and counseling for you. Applications for Spring 2010 semester will be posted October 1, 2009 and must be submitted by November 1, 2009.

Go to: [www.mnchildcare.org/TEACH](http://www.mnchildcare.org/TEACH)  
Or call: (651)290-9704 to learn more.

### What is R.E.E.T.A.I.N.?

Are you a child care provider in Minnesota who holds an Associate Degree or higher, or have you earned and maintained a CDA credential from the Council for Professional Recognition? Then you could qualify for a R.E.E.T.A.I.N. Grant.

R.E.E.T.A.I.N. (Retaining Early Educators Through Attaining Incentives Now) is a workforce retention program that strives to reduce the turnover rates among child care providers who work with young children. Grant recipients are free to use grant dollars as they choose. Grant dollars are considered additional salary and may be used to pay bills, reinvest in your child care setting, or cover personal expenses.

### R.E.E.T.A.I.N. Awards

The grants range from \$1000 to \$3500 depending upon the level of education attained. The grant application period occurs once a year.

Grant applications are available:

For **family child care** providers:  
June 1– July 31, 2010

For **center-based** child care providers:  
December 1, 2009– January 31, 2010

Applications are available at [www.MNStreams.org](http://www.MNStreams.org) only during these time periods. For more information, contact Linda Magel at [lindam@mnchildcare.org](mailto:lindam@mnchildcare.org) or (651)290-9704 ext. 108.